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LTER Unveils a New Decadal Science Plan

The Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) Network, www.lternet.edu, has released its new Decadal Science Plan, which maps out the Network's science agenda for the next 10 years. Titled "Integrative Science for Society and the Environment: A Plan for Research, Education, and Cyberinfrastructure in the U.S. Long-Term Ecological Research Network," the plan makes an ambitious call for research that extends the Network's foundational strength in ecology and environmental biology to also embrace the sociological sciences relevant to human-environment interactions.

Through the leadership of the Scientific Task Force and Science Council chair, the plan is the culmination of three years of network-wide planning activities financed by the National Science Foundation (NSF), which sponsors the Network.

The plan outlines how LTER will direct its research and education activities to address environmental grand challenges in three topical areas: land and water use change, particularly with respect to working landscapes and urban systems; climate change including variability and the changing frequency of extreme events; and changes in nutrient mobilization and biodiversity, as particularly related to species introductions.

"Through this effort we were able to achieve our goal of designing a one-of-a-kind long-term, multi-site research plan that genuinely integrates social-ecological research," said Scott Collins, University of New Mexico biology professor and task force chair.

The plan, available at <http://www.lternet.edu/decadalplan/>, has seven parts including an executive summary:

- 1.) an Integrated Research Plan that provides a blueprint for the next phase of LTER science and describes plans for network-level research into fundamental questions about socio-ecological relationships in important U.S. and international ecosystems;
- 2.) description of the *EcoTrends* project, a compendium of long-term ecological trends at and across LTER sites;
- 3.) strategic plan for education in the Network;
- 4.) strategic plan for Network cyberinfrastructure;

- 5.) new governance structure for the Network; and
- 6.) new social-ecological research framework known as *Integrated Science for Society and the Environment*.

Phil Robertson, chair of the LTER Executive Board and Science Council and professor at Michigan State University, noted that “hundreds of scientists have been actively engaged in the development of the plan, which is truly a broad-based effort that represents the community’s collective vision.”

Robertson added that the ecological community was “particularly excited about the potential for the plan to address important questions about the sustainability of ecosystems on which we all depend—questions that are not now being addressed in any comprehensive way.”

Since planning began almost three years ago, the Network has held scores of workshops and planning meetings that included scientists from the 26 LTER sites as well as many from outside the network.

Participants included ecologists, geoscientists, oceanographers, and other environmental scientists; social scientists including geographers, economists, sociologists, and cultural anthropologists; information scientist experts in cyber infrastructure design and implementation; and educators at the university, K-12, and public outreach levels.

Bob Waide, executive director of the LTER Network Office and UNM biology professor, observed that the most exciting and significant element of the plan was the involvement of many different disciplines, and particularly social scientists, to address urgent national needs from a socio-ecological perspective.

The LTER Network comprises 26 sites funded by NSF to pursue basic research in ecology and environmental science. Since 1980 the sites have conducted research to better understand ecological phenomena in both natural and managed ecosystems. A broad variety of ecosystems are represented in the Network, including tundra, forest, grassland, desert, urban, and marine sites, among others. For further information, including a list of current sites and principal investigators, see www.lternet.edu.

The Mission of the LTER Network is to provide the scientific community, policy makers, and society with the knowledge and predictive understanding necessary to conserve, protect, and manage the nation’s ecosystems, their biodiversity, and the services they provide.